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NEW NOVELS

Manhattan Transfer. By JOHN DOS PASSOS. Constable. 7s. 6d.
Hot Saturday. By HARVEY FERGUSSON. Knopf. 7s. 6d.
Dry Martini. By JOHN THOMAS. Brentano's. 7s. 6d.
Odalisque. By L. M. HUSSEY. Knopf. 7s. 6d.

The previous novels of Mr. John Dos Passos showed him to be a writer who can write. His *Three Soldiers*, which treated more elaborately a theme already outlined in an earlier work, *One Man's Initiation*, was a substantial, well-constructed war-novel. There was nothing startlingly new in its technique. Indeed, its rather crude realism, which followed the now conventional models, was artistically tolerable only in conjunction with the strong and honest impulse by which the book was so obviously actuated. The subtlety and restraint, however, which were deficient in *Three Soldiers*, formed the distinguishing features of *Streets of Night*. Here Mr. Dos Passos showed that he could produce his effects without dotting every "i" or crossing every "t." Now he has published *Manhattan Transfer*, which combines the large-scale canvas of *Three Soldiers* with the rich and delicate colouring of *Streets of Night*. But *Manhattan Transfer* marks an advance in another, and a very important respect. It is an experiment in method. Mr. Dos Passos has set out to reproduce the spirit and atmosphere of a modern city. This, of course, has been attempted before. Novelists in the past have endeavoured to capture in words the essence of the city by concentrating on one of its characteristic features, such as its size or its squalor, and making their novels either very large or very gloomy (sometimes both) to reflect the quality which they wished to emphasise. Mr. Dos Passos has dealt with the problem in a new manner. He has split up his narrative into brief scenes which suggest the rapidly changing sections of a film. By means of this device he has succeeded in accentuating the contrasts, the diversity, the unrest of a great city. The tramp, the murderer, the adventurer, the defaulting financier, the returned soldier, the actress, the waiter, the journalist, the lawyer, and numerous others in a Whitmanesque procession appear, reappear and disappear, showing, in the words of one of them, "how complicatedly things interact." The great advantage of this process is that it produces a detached transcript of reality, and avoids the mechanical effects of photographic realism. Indeed, we should not be astonished if Mr. Dos Passos adopted it as a means of escaping from the uninspired reporting, into which conventional realism often degenerates, and from which his *Three Soldiers* is not altogether free. The disadvantage of this method is that the units, into which the narrative is divided, are occasionally too short to retain their narrative character, and their relation to the whole tends to become obscured. This impression, of course, adjusts itself as the reader proceeds, and by the time he has reached the end, and is able to view the entire book in its proper perspective, he will probably find that the multiple and disparate fragments have been harmoniously fitted together. This structural achievement would hardly have been possible without a fabric of high quality. Mr. Dos Passos writes a rich, graphic style, which makes almost each separate sentence a thing to admire for its verbal workmanship. Here is a typical instance of the way in which he exercises this kind of skill:

> The gutted lunchroom was silent under the sparse glower of two bulbs hanging over the counter where remained a few pies under a bell glass, and a man in a white coat nodding on a tall stool. Now and then the eyes in his grey doughy face flicked open and he grunted and looked about. At the last table over were the hunched shoulders of men asleep, faces crumpled like old newspapers pillowed on arms. . . . A woman blobby under a raincoat with a face red and purplish streaked like rancid meat was asking for a cup of coffee at the counter . . .

Manhattan Transfer abounds in such passages as this, which are the product of a keen eye and a copious, but judiciously manipulated vocabulary. There are a few lapses into mannerism or excess. Thus, he conjugates the verb "to seep" far too often, and the reader will note some dubious epithets. But, in the main, Mr. Dos Passos, although playing an intricate melody, rarely hits the wrong note. He has a great command of words, and they rarely disobey him. Incidentally, the extract quoted will doubtless suggest the name of the author whom Mr. Dos Passos has been reading to his own advantage. The following paragraph reveals the same source of inspiration even more unmistakably:

> Ellen in her new dress of Black Watch plaid mummy'd bought at Hearn's walked down the asphalt path kicking her toes in the air. There was a silver thistle brooch on the shoulder of the new dress of Black Watch plaid mummy'd bought at Hearn's. Elaine of Lammermoor was going to be married. The Betrothed. Wangnaan nainainai, went the bagpipes going through the rye. The man on the bench has a patch over his eye. A watching black patch. A black watching patch. The kidnapper of the Black Watch, among the rustling shrubs kidnappers keep their Black Watch . . .

And so on. Here the advantage to Mr. Dos Passos is perhaps smaller, but echoes of this kind are much less frequent. And, in any case, *Manhattan Transfer* is by no means a mere experiment in method and style. The ingredients of the story reflect a remarkable familiarity with human beings of the most varied types, and the haunts appropriate to them. Mr. Dos Passos is particularly successful with some of his minor characters who emerge from the metropolitan welter for a few minutes, and then vanish again. They go, but they are not forgotten. The leading peculiarities of their speech, their dress, their features are fixed in the memory. Here, too, the range is very wide. The grim figure of the tramp in the casual-ward ("a shambling man with curly weather-bleached hair and beard and eyes as if hammered into his head"), to whom Bud confesses his murder, is as vivid as the serio-comic tobacconist Mr. Goldstein ("a larva-shaped man with a hooked nose a little crooked in a grey face, behind which attentive ears stood out unexpectedly"), who was held up in his cigar-store by "The Gilded Bandits." And then, of course, there are the more detailed portraits of those who recur throughout the story, from childhood to maturity or beyond. Altogether, *Manhattan Transfer* ranks with *Martin Arrowsmith* and *An American Tragedy* as one of the most noteworthy novels recently introduced here from America.

After *Manhattan Transfer*, which is so tightly packed with material, *Hot Saturday* is a distinctly minor affair. Not that it is without merits. On the contrary, it is an illuminating study of life in the West End of the Wild West. But the account of how Ruth Bruck planned to capture the guileless Wilbur Fadden, the visitor from New York, and after what seemed a shameful failure, was shamefully successful, needs much padding to fill 261 pages. A good deal of the padding is brisk, attractive stuff, but it scarcely conceals Mr. Fergusson's effort to make a short story masquerade as a novel. Still, *Hot Saturday* does at least explain why people leave American towns, as here described, for New York, even though they have read *Manhattan Transfer*. On the whole, *Hot Saturday* was worth bringing across the Atlantic.

Dry Martini was not. The blurb (surely the time has now come to dispense with the inverted commas) says, in a lyrical rapture which is a trifle incoherent and not at all accurate: "As light and airy as a June morning on the Champs Elysées. Or, if you will, as gay as an evening at Place Pigalle . . . Sparkling, witty, *épatant*." No, this is not at all accurate. The experiences of Mr. Willoughby Quimby, the wealthy and worthless American, when the arrival of a grown-up daughter dislocates the harmonious irregularity of his life in Paris, might have been recounted either in a cynical vein or in a sentimental one. Actually, Mr. Thomas has mixed cynicism with sentiment, the resulting product being vulgarity. This is perhaps the quality which the blurb describes as *épatant*. Or does this refer to the heavy jokes about alcohol? Anyhow, *Dry Martini* was not worth bringing across the Atlantic.

Odalisque, on the other hand, is a sound, competent piece of work. The Venezuelan setting is picturesque, but not so sharply focused as to produce the impression of being a mere series of snapshots. And although the story follows familiar lines—impetuous girlhood victimised by unscrupulous hedonism, but finally rescued by faithful forgiveness—the characters have enough individuality to make their actions credible and acceptable. Panchita's infatuation for Reinaldo, with its pitiful sequel in New York, might have been nothing more than a banal subject for a film in three reels, and Mr. Hussey deserves much credit for having saved it from this fate by a wide margin. The most striking and convincing figure in the book is Dr. Juan Dupuy, the one-time pedlar's boy, who owed his rise in life largely to Armando Ramírez, Panchita's father, and whose gratitude has a touch of nobility about it. Here again, Mr. Hussey was on dangerous ground, and here again he avoids the pitfalls into which a less skilful writer would inevitably have blundered. In fact, there is real dramatic strength in the scene where Dr. Dupuy, in order to spare Ramírez the scandal which is beginning to connect his daughter's name with that of Reinaldo, induces, or rather forces, the latter to leave Caracas. A few obvious criticisms suggest themselves. Would Dupuy, only a few hours later, have divulged to Ramírez the very secret which he had taken such trouble to efface, merely because in the meanwhile Panchita had left home to follow Reinaldo? Mr. Hussey does not seem to have made this quite plausible.

And how does he intend the conclusion to be taken? Elsewhere his meaning is always notably clear, but we have read the last two pages several times without grasping their purport. Finally, there is some doubt whether *Odalisque* is an appropriate title. In all other respects, however, Mr. Hussey has written, a sound, competent piece of work. If all first novels were as good as this, far fewer superfluous books would be published.

P. S.

SCIENTISTS ABROAD

Farrer's Last Journey. By E. H. M. Cox. Dulau. 18s.

In Ashanti and Beyond. By A. W. CARDINAL. Seeley, Service. 21s.

Nature Jottings of a Motorist. By H. MORTIMER BATTEN. Herbert Jenkins. 7s. 6d.

The modern traveller must keep his eyes open if he is to tell us anything new. It is true that a surprisingly large part of the earth's surface remains almost unexplored. It is still open to any well-to-do and well-equipped traveller to experience the sensation of setting down his foot "where no white man's foot has trod before." But the main outlines are known. It is no longer possible to return from a journey (except, perhaps, from the Polar regions) with a new mountain range or a new lake district to your credit. The demand is rather for detail. There must be a growing interest in the world we live in, a steadily increasing number of stay-at-home Englishmen eager for information about places they have never seen and never mean to see—there *must* be, or how shall we account for this vast output of travel books? But we no longer expect dramatic geographical discoveries, hairbreadth escapes from cannibals and poisoned arrows. It is enough for us to get a true and living picture of conditions outside our own experience. The traveller need not even leave the beaten track, so long as he can see upon it the strange, exotic things we long to hear about.

That is where the scientist comes into his own. He is a trained observer. His eye has been taught to pick out certain phenomena, and, by the mere recording of these, he gives us (almost against his will, it sometimes seems) just the feast of facts that our imaginations need to feed upon. He fills in the map, so to speak, peoples the valleys, clothes the hills with colour. If he happens also to have the gift of expressing himself in writing, so much the better for us. Mr. E. H. M. Cox's admirable account of the last journeys (for there were really two) of the late Reginald Farrer in Upper Burma is a case in point. Anyone interested in travel has read books on the Burmese Alps, knows roughly the configuration of the country, something of the manners and customs of the inhabitants. But it is necessary to follow a botanist over these wild mountain ranges to get any lasting impression of their scent and their colour. Both these botanists, fortunately, can write. Mr. Cox talks of rhododendrons fifty feet high and magnolias of sixty feet and more. Sometimes they had to *shoot* down their specimens with rifles, to the horror of their native servants, who could not understand such a wicked waste of cartridges. The whole country, says Mr. Cox, is overgrown—"nothing more than a gigantic propagating bed." It is, in fact, a botanist's paradise. They had their own special glade, by a stream at the bottom of a valley:

> Here we were with a botanic garden at our feet. My bed sank into a springy floor of *R. calostrotum*, while the servants had a mattress of *R. myrtilloides*. Swathes of a snow-white Cerastium had to be cut down to make a level for the dinner tent. Each mossy boulder by the streamlet had its satellites of various Herculus Saxifrages in vast abundance. We could not move a step without trampling on something that we would have given a fortune to transport bodily to our gardens. The welter of bloom in that part of the world, when the country is not swamped by Bamboo, is entirely beyond my power of description. There it is, quite unseen by man, not even browsed over by animals, and rarely harmed by insects.

There was one rhododendron, with blood-scarlet flowers, of which Mr. Cox says that the colour "almost hurts." Farrer himself wrote that the tone was "perfectly clean and pure, but without the almost heavy bloodiness of some of the red Arboreums and Barbatums—a colour so lucent and intense that for two or three minutes after looking away from the flowers one's sight is numbed and sees everything greenish and dull." Farrer, it will be gathered, had a fine descriptive power, and it is a pity that, "for family reasons," it has not been possible to use his diaries here. But there are numerous extracts from his newspaper articles and from the letters he wrote before his untimely death, which took place at Nyitadi, in September, 1920, after Mr. Cox had gone home. They are sufficient to enable us to understand why few horticultural writers have had a larger following. Incidentally we get an amusing glimpse into the familiar controversy between gardeners and collectors. We all know the gardener's point of view. Messrs. Cox and Farrer write as collectors. When exotic plants fail in England, they argue, it is generally the gardener's own fault. But Mr. Cox adds some very useful notes on how to deal with *Primuli moscophora* and one or two others. And he frankly admits that the reason why one kind of jasmine from the Burmese Alps flourishes in Sussex, while another from the same place fails, is "something that no botanist can explain." Nor can the collector fairly be blamed for it.

Mr. A. W. Cardinal is not primarily a scientist, though he can write F.R.G.S. and F.R.A.I. after his name. As a resident magistrate on the Gold Coast for many years, it has been his business to get to know the people and his principal recreation to shoot big game. He understands and likes the natives, and treats even their superstitions with some degree of respect. On one occasion he himself was following the spoor of a hyena, when it "suddenly changed into the track of man." He leaves his readers to decide whether or not the familiar native explanation that this was a "hyena-man" contains some grain of truth. His hunting stories, too, are excellent. But his best chapters, by far, are those in which he records his observations upon mammal and insect life. There is one dark grey ant, for instance, which performs a useful service in raiding the nests of the white ant. These raids must be carefully planned and timed, for if the white "soldier" ants get out in time, the raiders are killed. Mr. Cardinal has only once seen this happen and Mr. Cardinal knows his West African ants as few myrmecologists do.

Mr. Batten brings us back to our text. The popular idea of the motorist's view of the countryside is summed up in the well-known dialogue: "*Isn't* this a pretty village?"—"Yes, *wasn't* it!" But if the occupant of the car is a lynx-eyed zoologist like Mr. Batten, he will see all sorts of things that the average pedestrian misses every time. Mr. Batten takes us no further afield than the Lothians; but such incidents as an owl dashing itself to death against the headlights, a kingfisher flying in at the window pursued by a hawk, a duel at the roadside between stoat and rat, and a lively encounter with a weazel, suggest quite a new view of motoring and add interest and romance to the most familiar country road. Mr. Batten writes delightfully—as he always does. He is one of those fortunate people who seem to see something exciting every time they look over a hedge. Yet we never doubt his word. We know that it is we who are blind.

ANTS, REPTILES AND BIRDS

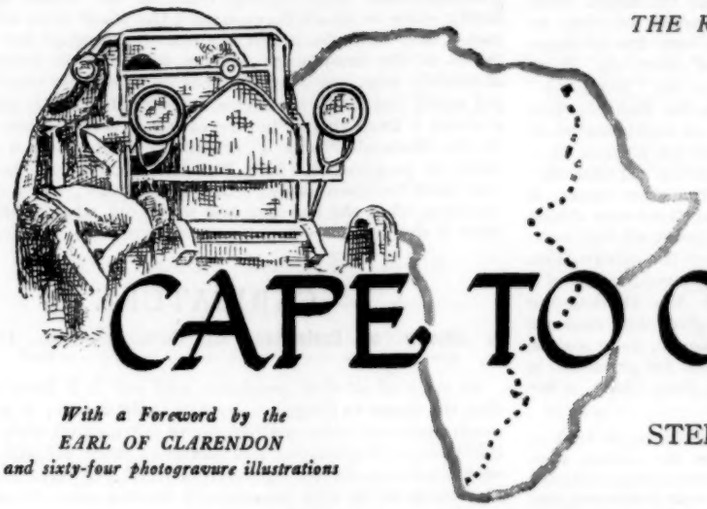
Reptiles and Amphibians: Their Habits and Adaptations. By THOMAS BARBOUR. Harrap. 10s. 6d.

British Ants: Their Life History and Classification. By H. ST. J. K. DONISTHORPE. Routledge. 25s.

Animal Mind. By FRANCES PITT. Allen and Unwin. 15s.

The rattlesnake has now been proved incapable of hearing the sound of his own rattle. His ears are tuned to a different wave-length. None of the many strange things Mr. Barbour describes leaves so deep an impression as that. For the rattlesnake to pass through the world with an accompaniment which has made him a bogey-man far beyond his haunts, and yet be utterly oblivious to it, is something on a different plane of strangeness from the twenty-nine-foot crocodile, or the flying snake, or even the frog which hatches young out of the hollows in its back. The serpent has a right to complain that Nature has not treated him fairly. Of the more ordinary sort of wonder Mr. Barbour has instances on every page—shell-headed toads which use their horny shields as stoppers to their burrows, the crater-like floating nurseries of a Brazilian tree-frog, snakes which carry the tail erect, swaying from side to side like a head, and frogs which sing under water, passing air to and fro between the throat-pouch and the lungs. *Reptiles and Amphibians* is an outstandingly good nature book; it is rare to find so high an authority as Mr. Barbour capable of writing anything so readable and so perfectly adapted to his audience. He never writes down to it, but he explains with a convincing clearness, and contrives, in a very general survey, to dwell a little upon the significant cases which strike the imagination. The photographs put to shame the customary ill-assorted collection which seem to have been beaten up as an afterthought by tired men.

HARRAP



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Nothing could stand a better chance of arousing the interest in reptiles which he feels to be their due—he complains with some reason of the disproportionate popularity of bird-photography, at the expense of his own subject.

Mr. Donisthorpe would have a right to say the same. New recruits drift naturally into the obvious studies of birds or butterflies and moths. Myrmecologists win very few of them, and are handicapped by a glaring shortage of observers. Even such common and widely distributed forms as the "wood-ant" (*Formica rufa*) and *F. fusca* have, according to Mr. Donisthorpe's information, yet to be recorded from areas as sophisticated as Hertfordshire or South Wilts; there are still six English vice-counties without a record of the common or garden ant (*Acanthomyops niger*). Again, *Formica sanguinea*, the slave-raider, is not a particularly rare species in the South, and its colonies almost invariably contain slaves, yet "In Britain during all the years that the habits of ants have been studied, since the observations of Gould in 1747 to the present time, only five records occur of a slave-raid having been witnessed." These Mr. Donisthorpe quotes in full; the fact that two are his own gives some measure of others' neglect, especially since the scene was no more remote than Weybridge. The best description (except for grammar) is from an unpublished MS. of F. Smith dating from 1846. After three years of watching:

> One morning . . . swarms of ants were spread over the bank in which the nest was situated. The larger ants, the soldiers, were very active, and constantly assuming the most threatening attitudes, standing erect, occasionally springing up on their hinderfeet, and snapping their jaws with great ferocity. The sun burst out, and the whole host rapidly retreated to their subterranean abode. Again, in the evening, I visited the spot, and to my delight I found the army again in battle array. Numbers of the largest ants at last separated from the rest, and formed the advanced guard or van, and the whole body was in motion. At a distance of about twenty yards was a nest of *Formica fusca*. This was the object of their attack. Without the slightest pause, the advanced warriors boldly entered the nest, and in poured swarms after them. After a few moments . . . numbers issued forth, each carrying their slaves in their jaws. Occasionally a number of black ants rushed out of the nest and gallantly attacked their invaders, but they were quickly overcome, and carried off to the nest of the victors. Frequently, however, they were torn limb from limb, in which case their mangled bodies were borne off, no doubt as food to the nest. In plundering a nest, although numbers of ants are carried off, by far the greater part convey the pupæ, or young brood, of the black ants, and I have some suspicion that it is these which, being born in the nest, become slaves from birth.

No one could even glance through this monumental work without concluding that the present neglect of the subject by British observers is serious and undeserved. It is to be hoped that the issue of this second edition of *British Ants* within ten years of the first is a sign of growing interest. Except for the photographs, which are mostly poor, the work is a model of what it should be. Allowing for the backwardness of its subject it compares favourably in fullness and accuracy with the best bird books we have.

That is high praise, for we have more bird books, and better ones, than any other country. Yet we cannot say with a clear conscience that ornithology has made the most of its exceptional opportunities. If we try to estimate the achievement of all those recruits, who might have done so much on ants or reptiles, or a dozen other branches, we can find little to show for it but a long catalogue of vagrant birds, mostly shot and all religiously recorded, and a discreditable history of endlessly duplicated collections, made by ignorant enthusiasts at the expense of rare and persecuted species, some of which have succumbed on that account. The numbers of eggs laid, and their markings, varieties of plumage, and a few other points are fairly exhaustively explored. But we do not know the incubation or fledging-periods of our commonest birds; we have only just discovered the springs of bird-song; we have no more than a faint idea of how long wild birds live, their sexual relations, their numbers, and so on. In brief, what can be done by rather unintelligent observation along the most obvious lines is done; everything beyond is not. To judge by what is published, nine bird-watchers out of ten are simply wasting their time on trivialities. One of the very few whose writings have consistently shown an intelligent perception of the underlying problems is Miss Frances Pitt, and her new book confirms the high opinion of her abilities which most field-ornithologists already hold. She writes in a popular style, and her books are as full of what used to be called anecdotes as any of their type. Her superiority lies in her outlook; she comes safely through all the test places where sentimentality or anthropomorphism do their best to creep in. We never have to quarrel with her on essentials, though sometimes on secondary points she seems to have been led into errors of judgment by insufficient reading and too much confidence in the universal validity of her own observations. Excellent as those are, generalisations from limited material are bound to appear faulty when we check them against the whole body of recorded facts. For example, in her chapter on migration her interpretation of the bramblings' longing to return to Norway rings absolutely true, but when she goes on to suggest that birds can *feel* north and south she seems unaware that she is not putting forward a fresh theory but repeating a very old one—in fact, W. H. Hudson's "sense of polarity," which was not even new when he proposed it. Miss Pitt rarely lets herself be tempted into these treacherous and futile speculations; when she simply describes what she has seen and works out what clearly follows from it she has few equals as an observer.

CARICATURE

A History of Caricature. By Bohun Lynch. Faber and Gwyer. 25s.

In spite of all that precisians may say it is hard to believe that the desire to exaggerate can be so depraved; it is certainly much easier and more comfortable to assume that while paragons like George Washington and Matilda's Aunt are able to tread with assurance on the tightrope of strict veracity, there is still something to be said for ordinary mortals who are constantly overbalancing into this or that abyss of falsehood. For the tendency towards some form of romantic inexactitude is so nearly universal, affecting the sophisticated no less than the primitive, that we are tempted to call it one of the fundamental impulses of human nature. The sort of facts that can be weighed to a nicety in scales and measured exactly with footrules are apt to be strangely unsatisfying; sooner or later we most of us set off in pursuit of some permanent unchanging truth that we are convinced must lie behind and beyond those rather bleak facts that are the only reality to the pragmatical and the unimaginative. No doubt it is part of the same desire to triumph over circumstances, to shape inert matter according to the promptings of our fancy, that brings to birth a work of art; for the paradox is a true one, that we can see things in their real shape only when we have distorted their proportions, heightened this feature, suppressed that, pared away this irrelevant and disturbing excrescence, or revealed that underlying armature.

Thus it would appear that art and caricature have this in common, that both make constant use of exaggeration and distortion; but whereas the artist exaggerates for æsthetic reasons, the caricaturist's motives for doing so are moral. For if the methods of the caricaturist are often those of the artist also, his sympathies are with the satirist; so from time immemorial satire has enlisted "caricature" in the service of morality, since one of the most effective ways of showing up an abuse is to present it in a new context, under a monstrous form, bloated and exaggerated, all misshapen and out of joint. Thus the anonymous but sprightly scribe relieved his feelings about Isaac of Norwich on an exchequer-roll of 1233, thus Gillray mproved upon even that prodigy of ugliness, Paul I. of Russia, thus Rowlandson hinted at the private life of General Howe and Miss ——. The castigation of vice is not, however, the only function of caricature. Sometimes it appears to be born of a pure love for the fantastic, as in those grotesques of Leonardo's; sometimes it is inspired by a sense of the incorrigible absurdity of mankind, as in the gently indulgent social satire of Max Beerbohm; sometimes it owes its existence to an almost reverent affection, which certainly accounts for the Oxford don of Robert Dighton or the drawing of Sir Henry Keppel by Roland le Strange.

Mr. Lynch, it will be noticed, puts a liberal interpretation on the meaning of caricature; turning from Philipon's terrible mask of Charles X. and Daumier's wonderful *Actualités: Irlande et Jamaique*, to the extremely mild irony of "Ape" or Mr. Kapp we may well ask ourselves what these drawings have in common beyond their reliance upon exaggeration to secure their effect. But as this comprehensive use of the term has etymology and history on its side, and as, moreover, it permits Mr. Lynch to include a great variety of entertaining work among his illustrations, it would be ungrateful to take exception to any looseness or lack of definition in the boundaries he has chosen for his theme; it is far better to attend to his urbane and well-informed discourse and examine without prejudice the charming plates that follow it.

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